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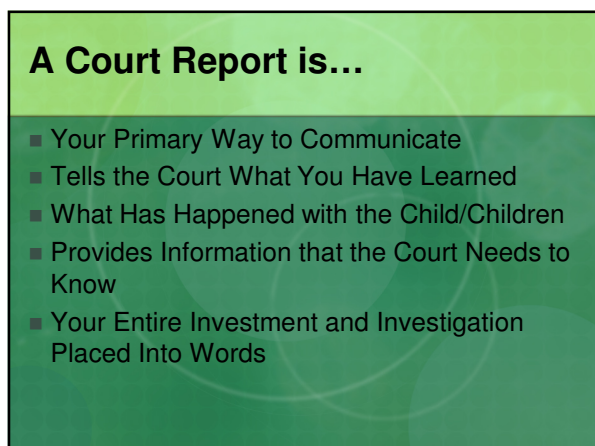
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## CASA reports

- Prepared by volunteers
- For a myriad of cases
- For courts with different desires for CASA reports
- Few clear black letter rules

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## Court Report Format

- Headings
- Situation/History
- Identification of All Records CASA Reviewed
- List of Persons Contacted
- Narrative
- Assessment
- Recommendations

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## Format Matters

- Clear Headings
  - remember your report is being read by people (sometimes substitute judges) and other players who are unfamiliar with the case and have stacks of papers to read
  - double check dates and spellings for accuracy, be careful when cutting and pasting
    - Examples reported:
      - Hearing date misstated as PREVIOUS court date, Substitute Judge never read the report, thinking it was "old news"
      - Incorrect date of birth on child with common name, report was placed by clerk in wrong file, Judge did not see report.

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## Identifying the Players

- Identify **all** the Significant Players
  - Relatives, caregivers, relevant medical personnel, counselors, helpful teachers should be identified.
- family members often have confusingly similar names, **state up front how each contact person will be identified** throughout the rest of the report.
  - Ex. Ms. Susan "Susie" Smith is the mother of Sue-Ann "Sue" Smith, the child was placed with the mother's sister Susanna "Anna" Smith, the child's adult sibling, Sue-Belle Smith has petitioned for custody.
  - In that case, using biological titles rather than names solves the dilemma: Clients Mother, Client, Maternal Aunt, and Petitioning Sister respectively.

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## Situation/History

This "flyover" is a key to the report

- Lays out the background in straightforward terms
  - Should be clear and brief
    - Example of *unhelpful* history. —4 single spaced page "Situation" section.
    - Example of *helpful* summary: This is the permanency planning hearing, the previous goal has been return home. Client is currently a ten year old, she was removed from Maternal Grandparents home on July 1, 2015 because of unsanitary living conditions (fourth report), and medical neglect. Mother had placed the child with her parents at age one. Though the Mother's paramour is in jail for sexual abuse of the child, mother denies the child was molested by her boyfriend. Mother continues to test positive for marijuana. Currently mother has complied with service plan goal of stable housing, but mother and grandparents have exercised less than half the visits offered by DHS. Mother states she will reunite with the boyfriend. Child has caught up with academic and developmental markers in pre-adoptive foster home.

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## Records CASA Reviewed

- Consider, Review and List All Relevant records reviewed.
  - Client's court records,
    - including previous custody orders,
  - Significant parties' criminal records,
  - DSS files,
  - Medical records,
  - Psychological and Therapeutic reports

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### Academic records

- Such as **report cards**,
- **attendance** and
- **behavioral progress** reports.

Lab results for **drug tests**.

- Actually review them!
- Ex. report indicated child was doing well in school (all A's and B's). actual report card came into evidence indicating only D's and F's. looks like REPORT FAIL!
- But CASA report was used to show this was not the most recent report card!

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### Narrative

- This is the body of the report, unlike the Situation and Assessments sections, it should NOT be conclusory.
- Different localities prefer different styles,
  - Some prefer **chronological** reports
  - Some prefer **clustered** or **topical** reports
    - All information relevant to a party or position is presented.
      - Ex. Interviews having bearing on Mother.
      - Interviews related to Foster Family.
      - Information supportive of each concurrent goal.

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### Keys to Having a Successful Court Narrative

- Be Thorough
  - Maintaining a Log/Journal
    - Will help to record information logically and make it accessible as you assemble your narrative.
- Be Specific
- Be Objective

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## Give Facts:

- Let the reader experience your observations
- Use **Visual** clues:
  - The Child's room was dimly lit, with only a single exposed light bulb on a desk lamp placed directly on the floor.
  - There were no linens on the bed, the foster mother pointed to the pile of soiled linens in the corner and said she would not wash them anymore this week-- that the client "needed to learn not to pee in the bed".
  - The child was observed to come home from the school bus, ran through the door with a breezy expression on her face tossed her books on the couch, open the fridge and begin drinking the glass of milk which she evidently knew was there, she stood behind the foster mother and queried "Mom, who is that?" while the CASA attempted to introduce herself.

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## Report **scents** that convey relevant information

- The child's room had the eye-wateringly strong smell of wet dog and animal feces from the five dogs that shared the room with him. CASA also observed seven exposed piles of apparent dog feces on the bedroom floor, two were clearly recent and pungent, others had dried and were appeared to be of less recent origin.
- The over-powering smell of human excrement emanated from the non-working toilet the child shared with his uncle and aunt, two cousins and three brothers. The aunt said it had been broken for two weeks and that DSS should take care of it. The aunt then related to CASA that she had never contacted DSS or anyone else about the broken toilet.

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## Share **sound** clues

The child's bed was separated from the in-use gas-run generator by only a cardboard box, flattened and folded into a screen. CASA observed the sound to be very loud. The mother indicated that she could not sleep in that room because "it is too loud, but you know kids, they can sleep through anything". The generator vibrated the floor of the trailer, causing a toy to vibrate off a shelf while CASA was present.

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## Sounds:

- The child shares a room with the mother. The five year old was given "privacy" by a room divider which had been borrowed from Mother's job. The mother sat on the bed while CASA was in the room, the piercing squeak from the bed was clearly heard from the place where the child sleeps. The mother indicated her boyfriend comes over for the night "but only after the child has gone to bed"

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## Consider reporting relevant tactile observations

- The child claims that he does not sleep in the room indicated to be his. He would not say where he slept, just "not there." CASA had previously noted a sticky substance on the child's purported bedroom doorknob, two weeks later CASA was surprised to observe that the doorknob was still so sticky that she had to wash her hands to remove the residue. The *door was closed* both times and could not be opened apart from the doorknob. The mother had no explanation for why the doorknob was still sticky two weeks later, she indicated that "I am telling you, he does not sleep with the other boy, I never noticed his doorknob".

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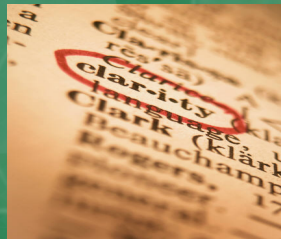
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## Being Specific: Clarity

- Observations, Not Perceptions
- Providing Dates
- Being Exact
- Providing Records




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CASA went with client to his doctor's appointment. Maternal grandmother, was carrying client and she was using child's blanket to block the sun from his eyes. Biological mother stated that she was tired and volunteered "I carried [client] for nine months that is enough". CASA did not go in the examining room. After the doctor's appointment, Mother and MGM informed CASA that client needs additional tests. Client has a doctor's appointment scheduled for January to receive a special test to determine whether he has sickle cell. As CASA was leaving, Grandmother was feeding client and instructed mother to put a hat on client's head. In response, mother stated to Grandmother "you don't care about me anymore, you don't love me".

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## Assessment

- An objective summary of the narrative facts
  - This may present categories of need
  - Sets the stage for the recommendations
  - Should consider all the needs of the child

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## Information to Consider in Recommendation Section



- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ■ Wishes of the Child/Children | ■ Child Development issues                               |
| ■ Is Placement appropriate     | ■ Suggestions for Parents                                |
| ■ Visitation suggestions       | ■ Suggestions re Foster Parents                          |
| ■ Education options            | ■ Further Investigation helpful for Court Report Process |
| ■ Psychological needs          |  |
| ■ Med/dental needs             |  |

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## Recommendations

- Placement
  - How is current placement working out
    - What would make that better
- Visitation and Contact w/ Family
  - Is Visitation occurring
    - Is it appropriate?
    - Is it enough?
- What Treatment is Needed:
  - Child
  - Parents
  - Siblings
  - Other Caretakers

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## Hearsay

- Virginia Law specifically makes admissible the properly prepared and presented CASA report.
- General Admissibility does not mean that individual items of *hearsay* or inappropriate allegations go in as evidence.

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## Submitting a Report

- 14 Days Before the Court Hearing
- Allow time for revisions, ask for feedback
- Follow local rules, our rule:
  - Must Be Submitted Thursday Before the Hearing or it Might be Stamped Late




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## Keeping Contacts

- Know your Client's current Goals/Hearings
- Foster Positive Relationships
- Stay Informed
- Be Proactive
- Keep-Up with FAPT Meetings and Hearings
- Be Independent



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## Making a Difference



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## Questions

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